

UNION SQUARE NEIGHBORS

May 30, 2017

Dear Aldermen,

As you continue ongoing deliberations on the proposed zoning for Union Square, we wanted to provide you on status update on issues that remain important to Union Square Neighbors (USN).

Representatives from USN and US2 have met on several occasions over the last few weeks to discuss matters of zoning. It has been a productive process that has led to several changes relative to issues that USN has made priorities. We have found common ground on several key issues including the height of the D6 parcel, public ownership of open space, and parking, and we have made progress on several others. Both sides have shown a commitment to continuing dialogue which we hope bodes well for the future of the Union Square and all members of our diverse community.

We are keenly aware that a host of public benefits can only become a reality if we move forward with the redevelopment process. We support you in your work to complete the zoning, and we remain ready to work with you on the remaining issues that will be deliberated tonight in order to bring this process to a conclusion.

Attached, please find a more detailed discussion of the issues that have been raised and where things stand.

Sincerely,

Rob Buchanan, Chairperson

Union Square Neighbors

Status Update on Zoning and Covenant Issues

Commercial Development

We have advocated amending the zoning ordinance proposal and/or the Covenant Agreement as appropriate to further enforce phasing of commercial and residential land use mix and development. The ongoing concern is that, aside from the requirement to build-out D2 first (including the 175,000 square foot building on D2.1), US2 could build almost exclusively residential uses following the build-out of D2. Whether US2 would pursue this strategy, and the Planning Board would approve of such a phasing plan, is certainly a topic of much debate and speculation. Our petition provided a number of suggestions to address this issue. We still think a solution is necessary to mitigate anxieties and provide you, our elected representatives, with assurance that this issue is being addressed.

Open Space: Public Ownership

Our understanding is that a satisfactory proposal for ensuring public access, ownership, and maintenance to ground-level open space is being developed by OSPCD, and we are encouraged that US2 has expressed to us a willingness to agree to this. We hope that you will review any proposed language to ensure that it would prevent changes that are not in the best interest of the public and maintain true public access.

Open Space – Size of Neighborhood Park and Vegetative Landscape

We expressed concern that a Neighborhood Park equal in size to only 8,000 square feet would meet an earlier draft of the proposed zoning. While we called for this to be increased to 1.5 acres (65,000 square feet), the May 25 draft of the zoning ordinance sets this minimum at 27,000 square feet, which represents the size of a D4 parcel on Webster Avenue. The May 25 draft also set a minimum requirement for 50% vegetative landscape or cover by tree canopy across all Civic Space.

We believe the 27,000 square foot minimum is acceptable, but believe that options to locate the park on the D4, D1 or D7 block need to be evaluated (including tradeoffs with other desired outcomes such as housing units, jobs, and linkage fees) during the Coordinated Development review process. We are encouraged that US2 has agreed to develop alternative design schemes for each of these options to facilitate an evaluation of pros and cons of each park location in order to allow for an informed decision to be made. The location of the neighborhood park is one of the most challenging issues that will need to be worked through during the Coordinated Development review process and we look forward to continuing to engage with US2 on this.

Building Heights on D6

We have expressed concern about the height of the buildings proposed for the D6 block. If too high (i.e., 110 feet), the buildings would cast the Union Square plaza in excessive shadow and block the historic views from Prospect Hill—compromises that Somerville should not make. Our understanding is that a satisfactory proposal is being developed by OSPCD which limits most the D6 building height to 85 feet (including mechanical penthouse(s)), while allowing modest overage beyond this limit (equal to five feet) for select building elements such as an elevator over-run. This was a topic of extensive conversation with US2, in part because it impacts potential lab uses on D6, so we appreciate that these changes have been made. It will be important to evaluate similar issues during the Coordinated Development review process, and we look forward to US2's willingness to address future issues to create the "rich and varied" skyline

called for in the Neighborhood Plan.

D1 - Indoor Civic Space

We advocated amending amend the zoning or Covenant Agreement, as appropriate, to include a provision that requires, on the D1 block, inclusion of an indoor, flexibly programmed space that totals at least 25,000 square feet, of which at least 10,000 square feet shall be a multi-functional gymnasium/recreation room that is open to the public. While US2 has expressed interest in accommodating this and finding a tenant who is interested in filling such a space, no written commitment has been made. We understand that US2 worked with stakeholders to refine the mix of commercial to residential an ensure that an indoor civic space could be achieved. It is also important that the City commit to making this a reality, but to date have not received anything from the City in response to repeated suggestions related to this issue.

Homeownership Opportunities

We asked that Covenant Agreement between the City of Somerville and US2 require that not less than 20% of all new units created on the development blocks be offered for sale instead of rented as apartments. It's critically important that there be equity-building opportunities for residents and that we encourage community stability through homeownership. While US2 has indicated there may be portions of the development that may be promising locations for town-home or condo units and has been willing to set this as a goal, no written commitment has been made. The creation of nearly 1,000 apartments and no homeownership opportunities would not be an acceptable outcome of this redevelopment and we continue to urge that this concern be addressed.

Family Sized Housing

We advocated amending amend the zoning ordinance proposal to increase the percentage of affordable housing units that must be at least three bedrooms from at least 10% to at least 20%; and require that at least 40% of affordable housing units must have two bedrooms. We also asked that the Covenant Agreement require that 10% of market rate housing units must have three or more bedrooms and 30% of market rate units must have two bedrooms. No written commitments or changes in the zoning or Covenant have been made.

Off-Site Affordable Housing

We requested that the zoning proposal be amended to state that rather than market rate units within the USOD cannot receive their Certificate of Occupancy until all inclusionary units, whether provided on-site or off-site, receive their Certificate of Occupancy—rather than the “commence construction” requirement in the current draft. In discussions US2 noted that in the instance that a building with off-site units was not completed, units in the generating building would revert to being "affordable" in order to meet the required number of units. We suggest that OSPCD review and confirm this. While our concern was specific to off-site affordable units, the same issue applies to arts and creative space or open space that are proposed to be provided off-site. We ask that OSPCD identify similar appropriate assurances that these will be provided.

Parking

We advocated amending zoning ordinance proposal by requiring that any increase in the 1,500 cap on the number of USOD parking spaces require a special permit and be granted only if a Transportation

Management Agency (TMA) has been constituted and determines that the only recourse for addressing the unmet needs for parking is to create more parking. US2 was agreeable to this change, and OSPCD included a satisfactory addition to the May 25 draft of the zoning ordinance.